

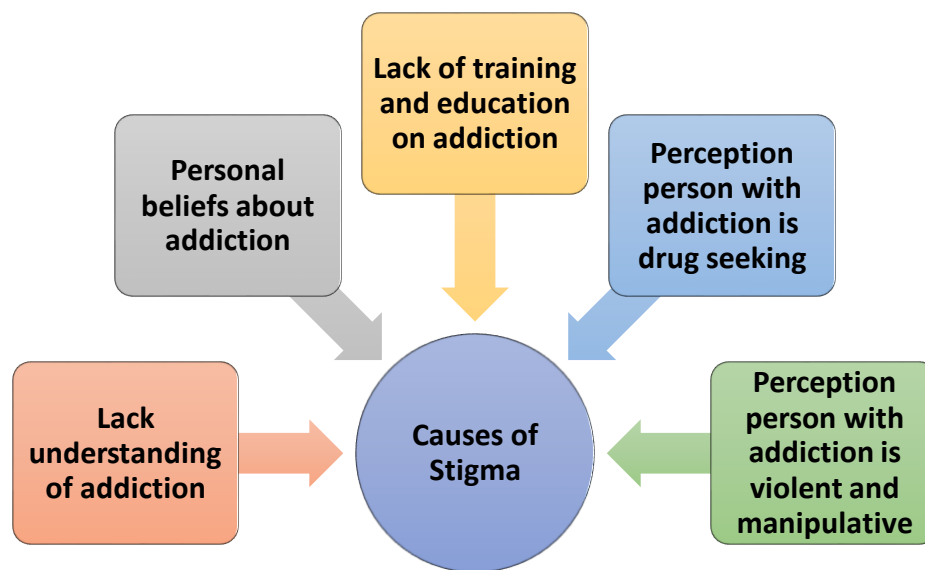


The Stigma of Addiction in Healthcare

Yes, it's true. The stigma of addiction does exist among some healthcare professionals.

- ◆ Research has shown that healthcare professionals often have negative attitudes towards people with substance use disorders and that these negative attitudes far exceed those reported for other medical conditions.
- ◆ Healthcare professionals who stigmatize a person with substance use disorders believe addiction is a choice, moral failure, or a lack of willingness to stop drug use.

Additional Causes of Stigma in Healthcare:



Behaviors Associated with Stigma Among Healthcare Professionals:

| | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| • Lacks empathy | • Limits patient interaction | • Fails to provide treatment options |
| • Provides substandard care | • Denies patient of care | |

- ◆ Some healthcare providers may not provide medicine to treat a substance use disorder because of the belief that it is trading one drug for another. The use of methadone, suboxone, or other medicines are used to reduce cravings, withdrawal symptoms, and to help restore balance in the brain. This is no different than prescribing blood pressure medicine to treat high blood pressure, chemo to treat cancer, or insulin to treat diabetes.



Realities of Drug Addiction

- ◆ Substandard care and poor treatment by healthcare providers leads the person with addiction to feel dehumanized and ashamed. They may increase their drug use leading to an increase risk of overdose and death. It can negatively affect adherence to treatment plans, increases the risk of not seeking future treatment, and negatively impacts health outcomes and overall well-being.

Potential Complications From Drug Use and Not Seeking Care:

- ◆ **Severe Illness:** Heart disease, heart attack, endocarditis, liver disease, respiratory disease
- ◆ **Infections:** HIV, Hepatitis B, skin infections, sepsis, abscess, sexually transmitted disease
- ◆ **Mental Health:** Worsening of mental illness (depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, etc)
- ◆ **Accidents:** Falls, falls with injuries, vehicular accidents, etc
- ◆ **Drug Use:** Increased drug use with increased risk of overdose and death

- ◆ It is crucial healthcare providers be trained in compassionate care for people with addiction. People with addiction deserve to be treated with dignity, respect, and compassion.

What Can Be Done:

- ◆ Make strong efforts to bring awareness of stigma and create individual and organizational competencies within healthcare.
 - ◆ A comprehensive, evidence-based educational program is needed to address stigma among all healthcare workers.
 - ◆ Speak out about the effects of the stigma of addiction and address it accordingly.
 - ◆ Provide for equal access to medications for addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery.
 - ◆ Use evidence-based practice in the care and treatment of a person with addiction.
 - ◆ Consult addictive medicine or a skilled addiction specialist for people with addiction.
 - ◆ Be selective in how you communicate. Do not use derogatory terms (addict, junkie, etc).
 - ◆ Withhold judgement and treat everyone with dignity and respect.
- ◆ Addiction is a chronic relapsing brain disease and insurance companies should cover addiction treatment like other chronic diseases (heart disease, arthritis, diabetes). Not only does the lack of coverage prevent many individuals from getting treatment, it also indicates addiction is NOT a disease. Providing the same coverage as other chronic illnesses would support addiction is a disease and could help to stop the stigma of addiction.



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